

## A REVOLUTION IN LITERATURE, 1917-1934

Russian G6010  
Fall 2011  
W 4:10-6  
227 Milbank

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Office hours: Mon. 10:30-12:30 and by appt.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the period 1917-1934, the world of Russian letters sustained numerous complex, impassioned, and largely simultaneous debates about the purpose, value, and influence of literature; the appropriate aesthetic response or responses to the Russian Revolution; and, most importantly, the course to be charted by the practitioners of the new, Soviet, literature. The object of this course is to examine the ways in which Russian literature, literary criticism, and literary theories responded (and contributed) to the abrupt change of political context brought about by the Russian Revolution, culminating in the formal adoption of Socialist Realism as the official method of Soviet literature by the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934.

### REQUIREMENTS

- Regular attendance and participation in seminar discussion (20%).
- Take-home final exam (40%), due on **Monday, December 12**, by email to rstanton@barnard.edu.
- Final paper of conference length (10 pages; 40%), on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. The paper is due on the last day of class.

### READINGS

#### Books

The following books are available for purchase at Book Culture (112<sup>th</sup> St. between Broadway and Amsterdam):

- Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry and Other Stories* (Penguin)
- Evgeny Zamyatin, *We* (Eos)

The following books are strongly recommended, but have not been ordered into Book Culture since we will be reading only excerpts in this class. However, if you plan to go on in Russian literature, you will be glad to own them. They are widely available online both new and used. The assigned excerpts will be provided in electronic (PDF) form on Courseworks.

- Carl Proffer, ed., *Russian Literature of the Twenties* (Ardis)
- James von Geldern and Richard Stites, eds., *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia* (excerpts, in course packet; the book, which I highly recommend, is widely available online both new and used)

#### Other readings

Most other readings, being out of print, will be supplied in electronic (PDF) form on Courseworks.

In addition, students will be required to read sections from Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, available online at: [http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit\\_revo/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_revo/index.htm)

## SCHEDULE

### Session    Topics and Readings

- 1**    **Introduction:** literary movements, factions, and confrontations of the “long 1920s” (1917-34).
- Aleksandr Blok and the Music of Revolution**
- 2**    ■ Aleksandr Blok, “The Twelve,” “Scythians,” “The Intelligentsia and the Revolution,” “The People and the Intelligentsia”  
 ■ Von Geldern and Stites, *Mass Culture...*, xi-xxvii  
 ■ Trotsky, “Alexander Blok” (in *Literature and Revolution*)
- Fellow Travelers, I: Ornamentalism and *ostranenie***
- 3**    ■ Boris Pilnyak, *The Naked Year*  
 ■ Trotsky, “The Literary ‘Fellow-Travelers’ Of The Revolution” (in *Literature and Revolution*)
- 4**    ■ Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (Penguin)
- Fellow Travelers, II: Science Fiction and Politics**
- 5**    ■ Evgeny Zamiatin, *We* (Eos)  
 ■ Innokenty Zhukov, “Voyage of the ‘Red Star’ Pioneer Troop to Wonderland” (Von Geldern and Stites 90-112)
- 6**    ■ Mikhail Bulgakov, “The Fatal Eggs” (in *Russian Literature of the Twenties*)  
 ■ Bulgakov, “Heart of a Dog”
- Early Soviet Action Heroes**
- 7**    ■ Marietta Shaginian, *Mess-Mend: Yankees in Petrograd*
- 8**    ■ Dmitri Furmanov, *Chapaev* (1923)  
 ■ G. and S. Vasiliev, *Chapaev* (film), 1934  
 ■ *anekdoty* about Chapaev
- ...and un-heroes**
- 9**    ■ Mikhail Zoshchenko, selected stories  
 ■ Ilf and Petrov, “How the Soviet Robinson Was Created” (in *Russian Literature of the Twenties*)
- 10**    **Proletarian Voices: VAPP and RAPP**  
 ■ Trotsky, “Proletarian Culture And Proletarian Art” (in *Literature and Revolution*)  
 ■ Kirillov, “We” (in *Russian Literature of the Twenties*, under “Smithy Poets”)  
 ■ Proletarian poems and sketches in Von Geldern and Stites, *Mass Culture...*, 3-6, 16-17, 22-29  
 ■ “VAPP Platform” and “On Party Policy in the Field of Belles-Lettres” (in *Russian Literature of the Twenties*)  
 ■ S. Evgenov “Gladkov and The Smithy vs. RAPP”: <http://www.sovlit.com/uncivilwar/>
- 11**    **Revolutionary Avant-Gardes: LEF and OBERIU**  
 ■ Vladimir Mayakovsky, “At the Top of My Voice”; “Vladimir Ilyich Lenin” (Von Geldern and Stites, 86-89)  
 ■ Daniil Kharms, “Incidences” (selections)  
 ■ “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” and “What is LEF Fighting For?” (in *Russian Literature of the Twenties*)  
 ■ Trotsky, “Futurism” (in *Literature and Revolution*)
- Formalism and Marxism**
- 12**    ■ Yury Tynianov, “Lieutenant Kizhe” (1927)  
 ■ Trotsky, “The Formalist School Of Poetry And Marxism” (in *Literature and Revolution*)  
 ■ Eikhenbaum, “The Formalist Method” (1927)
- 13**    Short stories by Olesha, Babel, Platonov
- 14**    **The End of the Beginning: Unity, Uniformity, and a Union.**  
 Speeches from the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934.